The Light in the Clearing

A Tale of the NORTH COUNTRY in the TIME of SILAS WRIGHT

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CHAPTER X.

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A Party and—My Fourth Peril?

It was a rainy Sunday. In the middle of the afternoon Uncle Peabody and I had set out in our spring buggy with the family umbrella—a faded but sacred implement, always carefully dried, after using, and hung in the clothes press. We were drenched to the skin in spite of the umbrella. It was still raining when we arrived at the familiar door in Ashery lane. Uncle Peabody wouldn't stop.

He hurried away. We pioneers rarely stopped or even turned out for the weather.

"Come in," said the voice of the schoolmaster at the door. "There's good weather under this roof."

He saw my plight as I entered.

"I'm like a shaggy dog that's been in swimming," I said.

"Upon my word, boy, we're in luck," remarked the schoolmaster.

I looked up at him.

"Michael Henry's clothes!—sure, they're just the thing for you!"

I followed him upstairs, wondering how it had happened that Michael Henry had clothes.

He took me into his room and brought some handsome, soft clothes out of a press with shirt, socks and boots to match.

"There, my laddie buck," said he, "put them on."

"These will soon dry on me," I said.

"Put them on—ye laggard! Michael Henry told me to give them to you. It's the birthday night o' little Ruth, my boy. There's a big cake with candles and chicken pie and jellied cookies and all the like o' that. Put them on. A wet boy at the feast would dampen the whole proceedings."

I put them on and with a great sense of relief and comfort. They were an admirable fit—too perfect for an accident, although at the time I thought only of their grandeur as I stood surveying myself in the looking-glass. They were of blue cloth and I saw that they went well with my blond hair and light skin. I was putting on my collar and necktie when Mr. Hacket returned.

We went below and the table was very grand with its great frosted cake and its candles, in shiny brass sticks, and its jellies and preserves with the gleam of polished pewter among them. Mrs. Hacket and all the children, save Ruth, were waiting for us in the dining room.

"Now sit down here, all o' ye, with Michael Henry," said the schoolmaster. "The little lady will be impatient. I'll go and get her and God help us to make her remember the day."

He was gone a moment, only, when he came back with Ruth in lovely white dress and slippers and gay with ribbons, and the silver beads of Mary on her neck. We clapped our hands and cheered and, in the excitement of the moment, John tipped over his drinking glass and shattered it on the floor.

"Never mind, my brave lad—no glass ever perished in a better cause. God bless you!"

We ate and jested and talked, and the sound of our laughter drowned the cry of the wind in the chimney and the drumming of the rain upon the windows.

Next morning my clothes, which had been hung by the kitchen stove, were damp and wrinkled. Mr. Hacket came to my room before I had risen.

"Michael Henry would rather see his clothes hanging on a good boy than on a nail in the closet," said he. 'Sure they give no comfort to the nail at all."

"I guess mine are dry now," I answered.

"They're wet and heavy, boy. No son o' Baldur could keep a light heart in them. Sure ye'd be as much out o' place as a sunbeam in a cave o' bats. If ye care not for your own comfort think o' the poor lad in the green chair. He's that proud and pleased to see them on ye it would be a shame to reject his offer. Sure, if they were dry yer own garments would be good enough, God knows, but Michael Henry loves the look o' ye in these togs, and then the president is in town."

That evening he discovered a big stain, black as ink, on my coat and trousers. Mr. Hacket expressed the opinion that it might have come from the umbrella, but I am quite sure that he had spotted them to save me from the last homemade suit I ever wore, save in rough work, and keep Michael Henry's on my back. In any event I wore them no more save at chore time.

Sally came and went, with the Wills boy, and gave no heed to me. In her eyes I had no more substance than a ghost, it seemed to me, although I caught her, often, looking at me. I judged that her father had given her a bad report of us and had some reasons, in spite of my knowledge that we were right, although they related mostly to Amos.

Next afternoon I saw Mr. Wright and the president walking back and forth on the bridge as they talked together. A number of men stood in front of the blacksmith shop, by the river shore, watching them, as I passed, on my way to the mill on an errand. The two statesmen were in broadcloth and white linen and beaver hats. They stopped as I approached them.

"Well, partner, we shall be leaving in an hour or so," said Mr. Wright as he gave me his hand. "You may look for me here soon after the close of the session. Take care of yourself and go often to see Mrs. Wright and obey your captain and remember me to your aunt and uncle."

"See that you keep coming, my good boy," said the president as he gave me his hand, with playful reference, no doubt, to Mr. Wright's remark that I was a coming man.

"Bart, I've some wheat to be thrashed in the barn on the back lot," said the senator as I was leaving them. "You can do it Saturdays, if you care to, at a shilling an hour. Stack the straw out of doors until you've finished, then put it back in the bay. Winnow the wheat carefully and sack it and bring it down to the granary and I'll settle with you when I return."

I remember that a number of men who worked in Grimshaw's sawmill were passing as he spoke.

"Yes, sir," I answered, much elated by the prospect of earning money.

The examination of Amos was set down for Monday and the people of the village were stirred and shaken by wildest rumors regarding the evidence to be adduced. Every day men and women stopped me in the street to ask what I knew of the murder. I followed the advice of Bishop Perkins and kept my knowledge to myself.

Saturday came, and when the chores were done I went alone to the grain barn in the back lot of the senator's farm with flail and measure and broom and fork and shovel and sacks and my luncheon, in a pushcart, with all of which Mrs. Wright had provided me.

It was a lonely place with woods on three sides of the field and a road on the other. I kept laying down beds of wheat on the barn floor and beating them out with the flail until the sun was well over the roof, when I sat down to eat my luncheon. Then I swept up the grain and winnowed out the chaff and filled one of my sacks. That done, I covered the floor again and the thump of the flail eased my loneliness until in the middle of the afternoon two of my schoolmates came and asked me to go swimming with them. The river was not forty rods away and a good trail led to the swimming hole. It was a warm, bright day and I was hot and thirsty. The thought of cool waters and friendly companionship was too much for me. I went with them and stayed with them longer than I intended. I remember saying as I dressed that I should have to work late and go without my supper in order to finish my stint.

It was almost dark when I was putting the last sack of wheat into my cart, in the gloomy barn and getting ready to go.

A rustling in the straw where I stood stopped me suddenly. I heard stealthy footsteps in the darkness. I stood my ground and demanded:

"Who's there?"

I saw a form approaching in the gloom with feet as noiseless as a cat's.

I Had Time to Raise My Flail and Bring It Down Upon the Head of the Leader.

I took a step backward and, seeing that it was a woman, stopped.

"It's Kate," came in a hoarse whisper as I recognized her form and staff.

"Run, boy—they have just come out o' the woods. I saw them. They will take you away. Run."

She had picked up the flail, and now she put it in my hands and gave me a push toward the door. I ran, and none too quickly, for I had not gone fifty feet from the barn in the stubble when I heard them coming after me, whoever they were. I saw that they were gaining and turned quickly. I had time to raise my flail and bring it down upon the head of the leader, who fell as I had seen a beef fall under the ax. Another man stopped beyond the reach of my flail and, after a second's hesitation, turned and ran away in the darkness.

I could hear or see no other motion in the field. I turned and ran on down the slope toward the village. In a moment I saw someone coming out of the maple grove at the field's end, just ahead, with a lantern.

Then I heard the voice of the schoolmaster saying:

"Is it you, my lad?"

"Yes," I answered, as I came up to him and Mary, in a condition of breathless excitement.

I told them of the curious adventure I had had.

"Come quick," said the schoolmaster. "Let's go back and find the man in the stubble."

I remembered that I had struck the path in my flight just before stopping to swing the flail. The man must have fallen very near it. Soon we found where he had been lying and drops of fresh blood on the stubble.

"Hush," said the schoolmaster.

We listened and heard a wagon rattling at a wild pace down the road toward the river.

"There he goes," said Mr. Hacket. "His companions have carried him away. Ye'd be riding in that wagon now, yerself, my brave lad, if ye hadn't 'a' made a lucky hit with the flail—God bless ye!"

"What would they 'a' done with me?" I asked.

"Oh, I reckon they'd 'a' took ye off, lad, and kep' ye for a year or so until Amos was out o' danger," said Mr. Hacket. "Maybe they'd drowned ye in the river down there an' left yer clothes on the bank to make it look like an honest drowning. The devil knows what they'd 'a' done with ye, laddie buck. We'll have to keep an eye on ye now, every day until the trial is over—sure we will. Come, we'll go up to the barn and see if Kate is there."

Just then we heard the receding wagon go roaring over the bridge on Little river. Mary shuddered with fright. The schoolmaster reassured us by saying:

"Don't be afraid. I brought my gun in case we'd meet a painter. But the danger is past."

He drew a long pistol from his coat pocket and held it in the light of the lantern.

The loaded cart stood in the middle of the barn floor, where I had left it, but old Kate had gone. We closed the barn, drawing the cart along with us. When we came into the edge of the village I began to reflect upon the strange peril out of which I had so luckily escaped. It gave me a heavy sense of responsibility and of the wickedness of men.

I thought of old Kate and her broken silence. For once I had heard her speak. I could feel my flesh tingle when I thought of her quick words and her hoarse, passionate whisper.

I knew, or thought I knew, why she took such care of me. She was in league with the gallows and could not bear to see it cheated of its prey. For some reason she hated the Grimshaws. I had seen the hate in her eyes the day she dogged along behind the old money lender through the streets of the village when her pointing finger had seemed to say to me: "There, there is the man who has brought me to this. He has put these rags upon my back, this fire in my heart, this wild look in my eyes. Wait and you will see what I will put upon him."

I knew that old Kate was not the irresponsible, witless creature that people thought her to be. I had begun to think of her with a kind of awe as one gifted above all others. One by one the things she had said of the future seemed to be coming true.

As we were going into the house the schoolmaster said:

"Now, Mary, you take this lantern and go across the street to the house o' Deacon Binks, the constable. You'll find him asleep by the kitchen stove. Arrest his slumbers, but not rudely, and, when he has come to, tell him that I have news o' the devil."

Deacon Binks arrived, a fat man with a big, round body and a very wise and serious countenance between side whiskers bending from his temple to his neck and suggesting parentheses of hair, as if his head and its accessories were in the nature of a side issue. He and the schoolmaster went out of doors and must have talked together while I was eating a bowl of bread and milk which Mrs. Hacket had brought to me.

When I went to bed, by and by, I heard somebody snoring on the little porch under my window. The first sound that reached my ear at the break of dawn was the snoring of some sleeper. I dressed and went below and found the constable in his coonskin overcoat asleep on the porch with a long-barreled gun at his side. While I stood there the schoolmaster came around the corner of the house from the garden. He put his hand on the deacon's shoulder and gave him a little shake.

"Awake, ye limb o' the law," he demanded. "Prayer is better than sleep."

The deacon arose and stretched himself and cleared his throat and assumed an air of alertness and said it was a fine morning, which it was not, the sky being overcast and the air dark and chilly. Mr. Hacket removed his greatcoat and threw it on the stoop saying:

"Deacon, you lay there. From now on I'm constable and ready for any act that may be necessary to maintain the law. I can be as severe as Napoleon Bonaparte and as cunning as Satan, if I have to be."

While I was milking the deacon sat on a bucket in the doorway of the stable and snored until I had finished. He awoke when I loosed the cow and the constable went back to the pasture with me, yawning with his hand over his mouth much of the way. The deacon leaned his elbow on the top of the pen and snored again, lightly, while I mixed the feed for the pigs.

Mr. Hacket met us at the kitchen door, where Deacon Binks said to him:

"If you'll look after the boy today I'll go home and get a little rest."

"God bless yer soul, ye had a busy night," said the schoolmaster with a smile.

He added as he went into the house:

"I never knew a man to rest with more energy and persistence. It was a perfect flood o' rest. It kept me awake until long after midnight."

CHAPTER XI.

The Spirit of Michael Henry and Others.

At the examination of Amos Grimshaw my knowledge was committed to the records and ceased to be a source of danger to me. Grimshaw came to the village that day. On my way to the courtroom I saw him walking

"Awake, Ye Limb o' the Law."

slowly, with bent head as I had seen him before, followed by old Kate. She carried her staff in her left hand while the forefinger of her right hand was pointing him out. Silent as a ghost and as unheeded—one would say—she followed his steps.

I observed that old Kate sat on a front seat with her hand to her ear and Grimshaw beside his lawyer at a big table and that when she looked at him her lips moved in a strange unuttered whisper of her spirit. Her face filled with joy as one damning detail after another came out in the evidence.

The facts hereinbefore alleged, and others, were proved, for the tracks fitted the shoes of Amos. The young man was held and presently indicted. The time of his trial was not determined.

I wrote a good hand those days and the leading merchant of the village engaged me to post his books every Saturday at ten cents an hour. Thenceforward until Christmas I gave my free days to that task. I estimated the sum that I should earn and planned to divide it in equal parts and proudly present it to my aunt and uncle on Christmas day.

One Saturday while I was at work on the big ledger of the merchant I ran upon this item:

October 3.—S. Wright—To one suit of clothes for Michael Henry from measures furnished by S. Robinson	$14.30
Shirts to match	1.70

I knew then the history of the suit of clothes which I had worn since that rainy October night, for I remembered that Sam Robinson, the tailor, had measured me at our house and made up the cloth of Aunt Deel's weaving.

I observed, also, that numerous articles—a load of wood, two sacks of flour, three pairs of boots, one coat, ten pounds of salt pork and four bushels of potatoes—all for "Michael Henry"—had been charged to Silas Wright.

So by the merest chance I learned that the invisible "Michael Henry" was the almoner of the modest statesman and really the spirit of Silas Wright feeding the hungry and clothing the naked and warming the cold house, in the absence of its owner. It was the heart of Wright joined to that of the schoolmaster, which sat in the green chair.

I fear that my work suffered a moment's interruption, for just then I began to know the great heart of the senator. Its warmth was in the clothing that covered my back, its delicacy in the ignorance of those who had shared its benefactions.

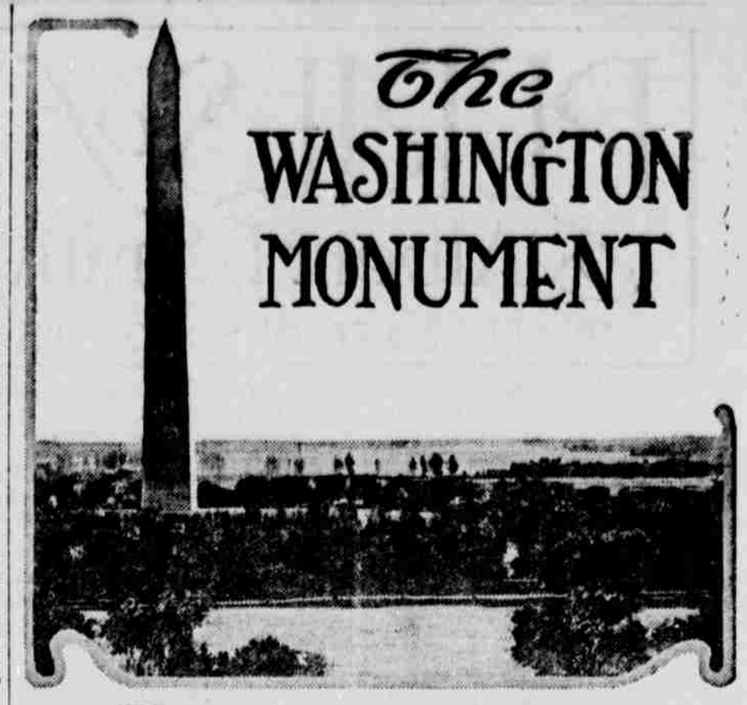
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Its Effect.

"They say the American doughnut is making a big hit with the French."

"Yes, it's just pie for them."

The WASHINGTON MONUMENT



"BUILD it to the stars; you cannot outreach the loftiness of his principles. Found it upon the massive and eternal rock; you cannot make it more enduring than his fame! Construct it of the peerless Parian marble; you cannot make it purer than his life! Exhaust upon it the rules and principles of ancient and modern art; you cannot make it more proportionate than his character."—From the speech of Robert C. Winthrop at the laying of the corner stone of the Washington monument July 4, 1848.

In the National Geographic Magazine three years ago William Howard Taft wrote of the Washington monument: "Taken by itself, the Washington monument stands not only as one of the most stupendous works of man, but also as one of the most beautiful of all human creations. Indeed it is at once so great and so simple that it seems to be almost a work of nature. Dominating the entire District of Columbia, it has taken its place with the capitol and the White House as the three foremost national structures.

"With a new character for each new hour, a different aspect for every change of light and shade, the Washington monument seems to link heaven and earth in the darkness, to pierce the sky in the light and to stand an immovable mountain peak as the mists of every storm go driving by. With a height of 555 feet, a base of 55 feet square, and walls tapering from 15 feet at the base to 18 inches at the top; with its interior lined with memorial stones from the several states, from many famous organizations and from a number of foreign countries; with its stately simplicity and the high qualities of manhood it honors, it is fitting that the aluminum tip that caps it should bear the phrase 'Laus Deo.'"

"Stately simplicity" is what makes the Washington monument one of the greatest in the world, observes the Kansas City Star.

Original Plan Changed.

The original plan of the designer, Robert Mills, was to have as the main feature of the monument a large columned pantheon to be used as a museum for war relics and statues of great men, and the obelisk was to arise from its center and surmount the whole.

The pantheon idea was abandoned later when the monument came to be built, and everyone feels now that it is a good thing it was so, because a building of any kind at its base would only detract from its sublimity and grandeur.

Washington himself selected the site for the monument, but at that time the intention was to erect an equestrian statue, which congress had voted for in 1783. Nothing was done until 1833, when Chief Justice John Marshall headed a movement called the "Washington Monument society," to solicit funds to build it. It was then the architect, Robert Mills, designed an obelisk surmounting a colonnade of Doric columns.

Some money was collected, but not enough to build it as planned, so the pantheon feature was abandoned and work begun on the obelisk. The corner stone, weighing twelve tons, was laid July 4, 1848, in the presence of 20,000 people.

In 1855 the funds ran out and work was stopped, and for twenty years the partly constructed monument remained an ugly stub. But the centennial exposition of 1876 brought a revival of patriotism and there was a nation-wide demand that the monument be finished. Congress took hold of it, funds were asked for from every state, as well as contributions of stone blocks with which to line the interior.

In 1880 work on the monument was resumed, but on altered plans. The foundations were enlarged and strengthened and the shaft increased in height. In 1884 it was finished at a total cost of $1,200,000.

Lower Walls 15 Feet Thick.

Following is a detailed description of the monument taken from the Rand-McNally Guide to Washington:

"The foundations are described as constructed of a mass of solid blue rock 146 feet square.

"The base of shaft is 55 feet square and the lower walls are 15 feet thick. At the 500-foot elevation, where the pyramid top begins, the walls are only 18 inches thick and about 35 feet square. The inside of the walls, as far as they were constructed before the work was undertaken by the government in 1878—150 feet from the base—is of blue granite, not laid in courses. From this point to within a short distance of the beginning of the top of the roof the inside of the walls is of regular courses of granite, corresponding with the courses of marble on the outside. For the top marble is entirely used. The work has been declared the best piece of masonry in the world. By a plumb line suspended from the top of the monument inside not three-eighths of an inch deflection has been noticed. The keystone that binds the interior ribs of stone that support the marble facing of the pyramid cap of the monument weighs nearly five tons. It is four feet six inches high and three feet six inches square at the top.

"On the 6th day of December, 1884, the capstone, which completed the shaft, was set. The capstone is five feet 2½ inches in height, and its base is somewhat more than three feet square. At its cap, or peak, it is five inches in diameter. On the cap was placed a tip or point of aluminum, a composition metal which resembles polished silver, and which was selected because of its lightness and freedom from oxidation and because it will always remain bright.

Staircase With 900 Steps.

"A staircase of 900 steps winds its way to the top, around an interior shaft of iron pillars, in which the elevator runs; few people walk up, but many descend that way, in order to examine more carefully the inscribed memorial blocks which are set into the interior wall at various places. Within the shaft formed by the interior iron framework runs an elevator, making a trip every half hour and carrying, if need be, thirty persons. As this elevator and its ropes are of unusual strength and were severely tested by use in elevating the stone required for the upper courses as the structure progressed, its safety need not be suspected. The elevator is lighted by electricity and carries a telephone. Seven minutes are required for the ascent of 500 feet; and one can see as he passes all the inscriptions and carvings sufficiently well to satisfy the curiosity of most persons, as none of these memorials has any artistic excellence. An officer in charge of the floor marshals visitors into the elevator and another cares for the observatory floor at the top; but no fees are expected. The surrounding grounds form Washington park.

"The view from the eight small windows, which open through the pyramidon, or sloping summit of the obelisk, 517 feet from the ground, includes a circle of level country having a radius of from fifteen to twenty miles, and southwest extends still farther, for in clear weather the Blue Ridge is well defined in that direction. The Potomac is in sight from up near Chain bridge down to far below Mount Vernon, and the whole district lies unrolled like a map. To climb the Washington monument is, therefore, an excellent method of beginning an intelligent survey of the capital and of 'getting one's bearing.'"

Eats a Thousand Bugs.

A cliff swallow will eat a thousand flies, mosquitoes, wheat-midgets or beetles that injure fruit trees in a day and therefore are to be encouraged, says the American Forestry association, of Washington, which is conducting the nation-wide campaign among school children for bird-house building. This bird is also known as the cave swallow because it plasters its nest on the outside of a barn or other building up under the eaves. Colonies of several thousand will build their nests together on the side of a cliff. These nests shaped like a flattened gourd or water-bottle are made of bits of clay rolled into pellets and lined with straw or feathers. This bird winters in the tropics.

Spray Painting Corrugated Steel.

The corrugated steel used for airplane hangars in this country and overseas was painted before shipment. Owing to the large quantity of steel, it was out of the question to do this work by hand and machines could not be used on account of the corrugations. For this reason, a spray system of painting was employed. First, the sheets were coated with red lead before being corrugated, and after that they received a coating of green on one side and gray on the other side, applied by means of a jet 14 inches wide.—Scientific American.